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## Monterey, California



# THESIS

FIGHTER AND ATTACK EXCELLENCE  
A LOOK AT TOP PERFORMING  
F-14 & A-6 SQUADRONS

by

Linda J. Laflamme  
December 1985

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Fighter and Attack Excellence  
A Look at Top Performing  
F-14 & A-6 Squadrons

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## ABSTRACT

Why are some F-14 and A-6 squadrons head and shoulders above others? What makes a squadron excellent? This is the question for this research. The study was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved interviews with 25 senior officers with some past experience in F-14 and A-6 communities. They were queried about their definitions of excellence and were asked to nominate a squadron which met their criteria for excellence. Phase two began with the tabulation of excellent squadrons selected by the senior officers. For the most part the selections in each category and community were unanimous. The selected squadrons were then visited and personnel within the squadron were interviewed and queried about why they felt they were chosen as the excellent squadrons and what they did that was different from other squadrons.

The result of this research has been analyzed and is presented in Chapter two in comprehensive detail. Chapter three contains the summary of what was found.

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In A Passion for Excellence the authors state that the acknowledgement sections of nonfiction books should be almost as long as the book. I cannot agree more, however, I will try to keep it shorter. First I would like to express my sincere appreciation to LCDR Wayne Farrens for all his time and efforts at the onset of this project. Without him I would have been severely handicapped in constructing a list of people to interview. Wayne was of tremendous help during my time of family crisis and throughout all the interviews. I would also like to thank all the officers and enlisted personnel who agreed to share their ideas and thoughts on the subject of excellence. They were truly a major part of this learning experience.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered why or how a squadron becomes excellent? Usually, if a squadron wins a major award such as the Battle E or, in the case of the F-14 community, the Clifton Award, they are considered to be the best squadron. Most of these awards are based on quantitative factors and are awarded at the end of some specified cycle. The real question becomes "How did they get where they are?" It is true that in almost all cases the excellent squadrons do win those awards.<sup>1</sup> I wanted to find out how a squadron becomes excellent. Basically the squadrons in each community have the same number of aircraft, the same number of personnel, and advancement of personnel via the same training pipeline. So, why are some squadrons heads and shoulders above others? In the "non-military" world it may be easier to find more objective criteria to measure excellence. Peters and Waterman, in their book In Search of Excellence, point out that companies can measure their success through market share, sales, profit ratios, etc. How can a squadron measure its success? How does it measure excellence? That was my question and the basis of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup>One of the squadrons which was unanimously chosen as excellent by senior officers interviewed in this study had not (yet) won the Battle E.

I conducted the research in two parts. The first part involved interviews with 25 senior officers, located throughout the United States, who had had prior command of an F-14 or an A-6 squadron. With a couple of exceptions, these senior officers were in positions where they still evaluated squadron performance by the traditional numerical readiness figures or they were still close enough to the squadrons that they were able to use their own personal observations. I conducted the interviews with the help of another officer, LCDR Wayne Farrens, also from the Naval Postgraduate School. We asked the senior officers how they evaluated excellence in squadrons, both from their desk and while visiting the squadron. We also asked them what the excellent squadrons were doing that other squadrons were not. Finally, we asked them to nominate a squadron that exemplified their vision of excellence. We were prepared to travel to these excellent squadrons unless they were deployed. The second part of the research involved going into these excellent squadrons and finding out what they do to merit such recognition. After receiving the recommendations from the senior officers, we travelled to the excellent squadrons. We interviewed the commanding officer, the executive officer and many officers, chiefs and enlisted personnel. We wanted to know why they thought they

were chosen as an excellent squadron and just exactly what they did to achieve this recognition from their senior officers.

We spent one day with each of four excellent squadrons: two in NAVAIRLANT and two in NAVAIRPAC, two were F-14, and two were A-6.

From each squadron, I was able to glean a lot of valuable information. My next chapter gives the attributes I found and categorizes them from A to Z. I found these attributes to be alive and well practiced by those excellent squadrons visited. The sections from A to Z are organized to include: the senior officers' thoughts on the subject, the thoughts of the personnel from these squadron, and examples of the subject. This "alphabet soup" of attributes is not intended to be a magic formula for achieving excellence. I intend it to be merely a factual account of what I found and hope that it will be useful to those in pursuit of excellence in their commands. My final chapter gives you my summations categorized into a more compact package.

## II. EXCELLENCE FROM A TO Z

Although the attributes of excellence which I found throughout my travels could be boiled down into a few categories, I decided to put them into categories from A to Z in order to explain them more precisely. Many of the attributes listed in this chapter interact with one another. Certain things will be mentioned more than once, but it is necessary to show how they impact on excellence in a command. I have included many direct quotes taken from the interviews I conducted. Who best to tell you the criteria for excellence than those who judge it and those who live it. Let me just get on with it.

### A. ATMOSPHERE TO EXCEL; EVERYONE IS SPECIAL, VALUABLE, AND WORTHWHILE.

We just have to provide the environment, the opportunity to excel. . . . The kind of leadership that fosters and engenders some kind of . . . informal environment where people don't feel threatened, where people can excel by blossoming from their own accomplishment and initiative. (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)<sup>2</sup>

I found that an excellent squadron creates its own atmosphere for achievement for all personnel. It begins at

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<sup>2</sup>Comment was made by a senior officer. All quotes made by senior officers will be identified in parentheses and will not be footnoted. The rank and position of the senior officers will also be noted.

the top with the commanding officer and permeates throughout the squadron. Everyone has equal opportunity to go for any training which will be beneficial to both the squadron and the individual. Many personnel are allowed to go for training even if their absence will temporarily inconvenience the squadron. All squadron personnel realize that this temporary inconvenience will result in long term benefits. One young sailor said, "I get the feeling that the squadron is looking out for your welfare and if you want a school, they'll get you a school. . . . It's that kind of attitude."

Another very important behavior in creating this atmosphere to excel is the care and concern that seniors have for their juniors. When I say seniors, I do not mean just senior officers. I mean all seniors: airmen, petty officers, chiefs, junior officers, department heads, XO's and CO's. Everyone cares for the promotability of their subordinates. They take an active interest in how their personnel are developing. Do they need more training? Should they get outside training? If so, they get it. Are the Personnel Qualification Standards (PQS) completed? Always. Is all the paperwork completed and submitted in order to insure timely recognition? The answer again is affirmative. All seniors are interested in their subordinates' progress. This means promotions, awards, evaluations and anything of importance to the individuals.



Seniors are willing to help each other reach the next higher level. This in turn, breeds a healthy respect for the seniors from the juniors. It also creates a very positive "can do" and "want to do" attitude. Additionally, it is a very infectious attitude. As a result of this attitude, many problem sailors have been turned around and have become productive members of their command due to this attitude.

The CO discharged all the dirtbags, or as many as possible. . . . The example of the quality people there [remaining in the squadron], set the tone [of excellence]. And we always had that, that percentage of [quality] people. I think it's also in the leadership but it's in appreciating the efforts of the individuals when they deserve it. That appreciation is so important. (SAILOR)<sup>3</sup>

Predictability, everything runs itself if you plan ahead. . . . A CO must, he can be as eccentric as he wants, but he must be predictable. The "troops" need to know which way he's going to jump and they need to know that in advance and they need to know that that's the key single thing to running a squadron. The CO has got to stay predictable. Ensuring that change is predictable . . . the "troops" need to know that he's going to be predictable. They can count on him acting the same way every time. If I reversed my positions all the time, how I saw things, I'd drive them up the wall. We'd all come around here in tight little circles and not get anywhere. I can't do that and every lower echelon knows how the commanding officer feels about things. (SKIPPER)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Comment was made by a sailor in an excellent squadron. All quotes made by sailors from these squadrons will be identified in parentheses and will not be footnoted.

<sup>4</sup>Comment was made by the skipper of an excellent squadron. All quotes made by skippers from these squadrons will be identified in parentheses and will not be footnoted.

The consistency and fairness of the leaders plays a very important role in creating an atmosphere where people want to work and excel. The senior officers who I interviewed explained how important it is for the commanding officer of the squadron to be consistent and fair with his people. It is critical that the squadron personnel know exactly how the skipper stands on important issues and whether he will stand with them or against them after they have made a decision. Squadron members become secure knowing what they can expect and what is expected of them. This security leads to a content individual.

Loyalty . . . if your people are absolutely sure that you're going to stand behind them 100%. If they screw up, you'll beat their brains out, but you'll do it. You're going to stand behind them and back them and take care of them, do everything you can to support them and make their life easier. And they reciprocate and give you, that's not to say they're "yes" men, 100% but they come in and close the doors and they don't go around and try to tear down the command at night. You'll find that an organization that has that can achieve fantastic sorts of results. (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

Several squadron personnel commented on this subject and the following quote seems to summarize the comments best. The junior officer was referring to the past two skippers of his excellent squadron when he said:

. . . always made it known up front that no matter whether it would be an emergency situation that we may run across on the airplane, whether it may be what's going to happen on a detachment, no matter what it may be. They had respect in us that we were the best we could be and there was nobody else they were going to have flying an airplane or leading this detachment or

whatever we might be doing. . They had the utmost respect and confidence in us and would support us no matter. If we did something and we thought it in our own minds what should be done and what was right, they'd support us. As long as we felt the decision was right, they'd support us and were always there. And that makes a big difference when you've got that support from the top.

This conversation followed a specific incident where a squadron CO currently in command of another squadron had been "bad mouthing" his junior officers to others.

The following comments made by senior officers are interesting and rather important when studying excellence.

Taking care of your people. There's a trite saying that if you take care of your people, then they'll take care of you. . . . If you show a genuine concern about people, the welfare, education and professional advancement of the people that work for you . . . they're going to put out. They're going to do the best job that they can. (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

I think one of the most important characteristics of people that makes them feel good about being in an organization is the sense of identification. If somebody feels that, and if somebody cares for them and wants them to be a player in the organization and they want them to be loyal and excel for the organization and they have a sense of participation it may be even in the direction, even if they're just a little airman, the CO knows who they are. They know they have identification with the power. . . . (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

If you're concerned about somebody advancing and getting up the ladder of success, then you're concerned about the right things and from a professional standpoint. (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

The good squadrons recognize the importance of the individuals at all levels, and they take care of them. You have to because you can't reward them any other way. It's not a hire and fire business, you've got to figure out a way to motivate people. And we do it! The good

squadrons do it by making them feel that they're something special. . . . But those people feel like they're something special and act like they're something special. When you get that going you're unstoppable.  
(SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

#### B. BASICS DONE WELL!

When the senior officers were asked how they identify an excellent squadron one of the things mentioned over and over again was "doing the basics and doing them well." "Do the basics perfectly." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) They stressed that paying attention to detail was critical in how a squadron is thought of by others. Although it sounds trite, dotting the i's and crossing the t's is something that comes through. Excellent squadrons know that the impressions they give others of themselves are made through correspondence: therefore, it is important that the grammar be correct and that the correspondence be accurate. It is important to note that an inordinate amount of time need not be given to these tasks, it need only be stressed that it be done correctly the first time. "If you don't have time to do the job right the first time, when are you ever going to have time to do it again? . . . Do the job right, do it right the first time. It's going to pay a lot of dividends." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO) Thus, requiring the "basics" becomes second nature. This is not to say that just the correspondence is important. "But I'm afraid that that organization under stress wouldn't hold up because it's not balanced. The excellent squadron, maybe that's what we're talking about,



is a squadron that's very, very well balanced . . . do everything well." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) All of the senior officers interviewed said they could tell if a squadron was excellent merely by walking through the spaces. If the quarterdeck was clean and attractive, this was their clue that the squadron was on the right track. "We find that those that look the best operate the best. Their spaces look the best. They have the cleanest maintenance spaces. They have the best airplanes. The seabag inspections, the ones that have the complete seabag have the best personnel. They also seem to have the highest morale." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Additionally, the seniors reported that other small points were equally as impressive, i.e., the heads were clean, the working spaces were habitable, the hangar was clean and the flight line was clear of F.O.D.<sup>5</sup> "Condition of the airplane . . . ramp spaces, the cleanliness, and the orderliness of the maintenance area and the hangar. Little things like the bulletin board, what do they have on the bulletin board? Not really a little thing. It's a very effective way of communicating to the squadron. How well do they adhere to their own procedures? And the attitude and interests and the enthusiasm of the officers?" (SENIOR,

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<sup>5</sup>Foreign Object Damage, (F.O.D.) an acronym used to describe debris which is found on the flight line and could potentially be ingested by the intake of the aircraft and cause engine damage.



FLAG, WING) One senior officer summed it up by saying that squadrons need to be balanced, that is, they need to be able to do everything well. "Good squadrons are the ones that do everything well." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) Another basic, yet a critically important factor in all squadrons, is safety. Senior officers said that there should be no accidents or incidents: however, when one does occur, those excellent squadrons will not try to hide the facts, they will not give excuses. The incident reports will be timely and accurate. "If they do have an accident, how well is the investigation . . . and the recommendations and the follow through? Are they quick to follow through to correct errors that they've made?" (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

Rules were made to be followed and excellent squadrons do just that. The example is set at the top by the skipper and all squadron personnel follow through. The following exemplify the feelings of the senior officers on this subject.

Expect a command to adhere to published procedures, the way to operate. If they don't (adhere to) the NATOPS, . . . then they lose. . . . You can't operate the machinery we're operating in this day and age without keeping to a set procedure (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

That squadron would be working very hard to ensure that all of their activity and all their daily routine actions are by the book. (SENIOR, FLAG, WING)

Making every effort to pay attention to all the details. . . . To produce that quality by the book

because the naval aviation has learned its lessons, unfortunately the hard way, and the book's written in blood. (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF)

I mentioned that the appearance of the spaces was important in distinguishing excellent squadrons from the rest. Let me also say that the appearance of the squadron personnel is another noticeable feature. Senior officers said that they knew immediately when they were among the best because the sailors were sharp in appearance and attuned to military courtesies. When a young airman cheerfully greeted a commodore and asked if he could be of assistance, this action made a big impression. ". . . extra attention to detail. . . . Squadron that can do all that and be there as a really unified organization with a smile on their face, and say, 'Here we are, we've given it our best shot, we're proud of what we've done, we're proud of what we are!'" (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

C. COMMUNICATIONS UP AND DOWN THE CHAIN OF COMMAND AS WELL AS OUTSIDE THE SQUADRON.

Communications has become a buzz word whenever discussing management problems. It is important to insure that there is good communication up and down the chain of command. It is critical that the "troops" be kept abreast of what is going on in their squadron. Equally important as passing the word is listening to the "troops". One senior officer said that when he visits a squadron, he makes a

point of asking one of the most junior enlisted personnel what is going on in the squadron.

You walk down to any shop you get anybody that's a third class petty officer or below and you say, 'Hey what's the squadron doing this week? . . . What's happening with your workups? What are the goals? What are you really working on real hard this week or this month? What do you think of your skipper?' And he'll say, 'Oh, I don't know, I've never seen him before. He doesn't say anything, he gives some workups and leaves'. . . . That tells me a lot right there. That would take about 45 seconds. . . . (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

This senior officer feels that he can grade the communications of the squadron by the response of the airman.

When I spoke to people in the excellent squadrons, I found that the commanding officers and the executive officers were concerned that the information they pass out was being received by all members of the command. One skipper explained how he conducted meetings with squadron personnel. One time he would take groups of people by rank. He would talk to all the officers, then all the chief petty officers, on down to a group of airmen. The next set of meetings he conducted, he would group the people in a mixed fashion, that is, some of all ranks, and not necessarily by shops. He wanted a good cross section of people. This, he felt, gave him a different way to look at his organization. It wasn't merely him talking to his men, but the men talking to each other, giving him an opportunity to see and hear more from and about his people.

Additionally, the skippers felt that it was equally important to keep the families informed. These skippers made frequent use of Captain's Call and invited family members to attend. One squadron set up chairs for family members to attend weekly quarters. "I'm amazed at how many wives and relatives will show up at quarters. We set 15 to 20 chairs out there, and if they wish to come, they do. And they do! They amazingly show up just to see what's going on. Often it's to see their husband or son get some award, and that's fine. At first you'd think it might be an embarrassment for them and they wouldn't do it, but soon they learned that it was accepted, that it was OK. Now they do it." (SKIPPER)

The skippers of the excellent squadrons indicated that they explained how and why decisions were made. "We try to tell our people . . . so they will have the least ramifications on their schedule. They know when they are going to be working hard, or when we are getting ready for a major evolution or when we can take some time off and enjoy it." (SKIPPER) Skippers feel it is important for their personnel to know why and how a decision has originated in order for them to be able to live with it. "So you try to keep people as best informed as you can about what's going on; what are their requirements, how many days are they



going to be away from home, when are they going to have to leave, when are they going to be able to come back."

(SKIPPER)

In each the squadrons visited, the commanding officers made it a policy to keep their office doors open. That is not to say, that they disregard the chain of command. All of them spoke of the importance of the chain of command. But, they also felt that the "troops" must feel that they have ready access to the skipper should the need arise.

This door is never never shut. If somebody wants to have a private meeting with me, that's one thing. But if I've got paperwork or I'm on the phone or anything like that, that door is open. And I tell everybody in the squadron from the youngest person in the squadron on up. "If you don't think that you can talk to your supervisor or anybody through the chain of command, you walk upstairs and you talk to me, because I'll listen and I'll take some action for you." And they believe that, and they do it. By me giving that much of myself to the command then the people in between understand that it's important to me and it's important to the squadron so they have to start taking better care and hand massaging their people and appreciate them.

(SKIPPER)

Another skipper explained that he always kept his door open, thereby reassuring his "troops" that nothing secretive was brewing.

Listening is as critical as communicating. The skippers I talked to know the importance of good listening skills and realize that listening is an important part of effective communication. It is only by listening that they can really know what is happening in their squadrons and how their



personnel actually feel. "We try to keep our people well informed, enlisted guys especially, . . . and we try to solicit feedback from them. The things we can change we just don't try to set policy and dictate policy and say, 'Well, you're not going to have a say in this.'" (OFFICER)<sup>6</sup> "Establish that two-way link of communications. A CO that goes down into the work spaces and makes himself visible and talks to the people, they get a nice warm fuzzy feeling that this guy is concerned about what I do." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

Those excellent squadrons know how to make use of those things other squadrons sometimes take for granted. For instance, Captain's Calls are used frequently and complete information is passed on. The "troops" feel that they are able to question the skipper concerning issues that exist in the squadron. The fact of having Captains's Calls alone is not what produces this freedom to speak, but that has become a side benefit. The skipper really does know what is going on in the lower ranks. His people keep him informed about how they feel. They also understand what he is saying and where he is coming from and are willing to follow him anywhere. Bulletin boards and Plans of the Day (POD), which

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<sup>6</sup>Comment was made by an officer in an excellent squadron. All quotes made by officers from these squadrons will be identified in parentheses and will not be footnoted. When available, the rank of the officer will also be noted.

are disseminated throughout the squadron, are very informative and very current. The sailors know that the facts are given to them. "When we have a heavy schedule coming up, they always let us know. 'Don't make plans for the weekend, we'll probably be working.' Very good communication from the top to the bottom. They're not saying like, putting themselves above everybody else, hey we're a team, this is what's going to happen." (SAILOR) They also know that there will be recognition for what they do. The recognition comes in all forms, POD, Bulletin board, Captain's Call, regular quarters, inspections and in any other way available to praise the "troops". This positive recognition goes quite a long way and perhaps it falls subject to the self-fulfilling prophecy. "A squadron that is going someplace is fairly well focused and the people . . . on board are happy because things are well defined. They have specific objectives and when they meet them, they get positive reinforcements." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

The senior officers said that communicating with the "troops" and listening to them is probably the most important thing a leader can do. The excellent squadrons showed me that communications can and do flow freely. Also pointed out is the fact that it is imperative to listen to the "troops" in order to know if you are still communicating with them. "Listen to your men" (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

Another often mentioned subject pertaining to communication is how well the squadron communicates with the staff, their boss, CAG.<sup>7</sup> "Communications with the staff, a lot of people are afraid of the staff. Some COs I never hear from. Some I can't chase away. . . . 'This is going on in my group. I've got it under control. I just wanted you to know about it.' That type of attitude." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Skippers from excellent squadrons seem to know the importance of the staff and make use of the staff's help to their maximum advantage.

Some interesting comments made by the command personnel of the excellent squadrons concerning the communications in their commands follows.

Rumors come out all the time about ships deploying. Where are we going? When are we leaving? And anytime something would come out, rumor or official word, we would immediately try to get everyone together to dispel any fears, relieve any apprehensions or just to confirm that, "Yes, in fact, this is true and this is now the way the schedule looks from today or as of when the word came out." And, I think, that helps to put a little trust in the enlisted. Trust in the command that they are in fact, looking out after their [troops'] interests and it tends to build a little unity. When everyone's getting geared up for a cruise, it's a traumatic time. Families are starting to prepare and all the things that go into that. So that becomes extremely important to individuals and we make more than average efforts to try to dispel that. (SAILOR)

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<sup>7</sup>CAG is an old term which stands for Carrier Air Group Commander. Carrier Air Wing Commander (CVW) is the more current term, however, many people still use the term CAG.

I see more rapport in this squadron just like the other guys have alluded to then in any other squadron in the past. (SAILOR)

I like how, if you have a problem anywhere in the squadron, whether it's an admin, personnel, maintenance, or operations, you can go to that department and you can get a straightforward answer, the first time around. You won't get a runaround. If that person you ask doesn't know anything about what you're talking about, they'll find out for you. You don't get pushed to the side. (SAILOR)

I've only been here since Monday but I've noticed good communications between the senior and junior personnel. . . . What you need to know you can find out. (SAILOR)

#### D. DELEGATION WITH ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The senior officers explained that delegating work down to your "troops" and holding them accountable for this work is necessary. They need responsibility. "It (excellent squadron) likes a challenge, never grumbles at a challenge. You can't give them enough." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) The senior officers said that the skipper and other key people are not micromanagers. Some of the command personnel made this same point. "Traditionally there are two types of skippers, I think. There's the type that wants to do everything himself. There's not a piece of paper that leaves the squadron without him re-writing everything completely on it and ours doesn't do tha. . . . He places faith in his people and we try not to let him down. He also holds department heads accountable, they hold us accountable and, in turn, we hold our responsible troops accountable for it



so that the skipper takes everything and it gets passed on down as it should be." (OFFICER) The leaders of the squadron are busy insuring that the future requirements of the squadron will be met. They push as much work down the chain as they are able to and then follow through on what they have assigned. "Everybody is responsible up their chain. . . . I've been in other squadrons where the decision was made at one level and one level only." (SAILOR)

In reality, I found that the skipper and the XO do just that. They are busy planning six months to one year ahead. They are not concerned with the little daily problems for they have faith that their people will take care of them. They are busy planning strategies. They are not involved in putting out the small fires from day to day. In fact, they have very few last minute problems. One of the squadrons was less than one month away from deployment. They had done their planning far in advance of this date and were so prepared for the upcoming deployment that their personnel were not working weekends. Everything that needed to be taken care of was completed during the regular working hours. I observed this same squadron preparing for a personnel inspection. Had I not known about the inspection I would have never guessed it was coming within the next hour. There was none of the usual scurrying about that one



usually experiences. All personnel were "squared away" and working on routine things, waiting for the inspection hour to arrive. The spaces were in perfect order.

In the squadrons, I found individuals who were quite content because they were in charge of their shops. The following is a quote from one of the happy shop supervisors. "Well, just in my area I'm the shop supervisor here. We have a maintenance master chief that allows me to run my shop. He doesn't do it. It's the best situation in life you can have, to be able to supervise your shop without having other middle managers get involved. . . . And that way my shop knows who is driving them. . . . I, in turn, answer higher up and that allows me to be the buffer zone. . . . I think that makes a better work environment for the workers out there." (SAILOR)

Another thing that was mentioned by some of the senior officers was that along with passing things down to people, it is important to accept their work. They made the distinction that poor work was not acceptable, but it was a good idea to accept something, like an evaluation, which, although grammatically correct, was not worded just exactly the way the senior would like. The senior officers pointed out that the person who wrote the evaluation was much closer to the facts. In a nutshell, I saw in the excellent squadrons that people want and appreciate responsibility.

E. ENTHUSIASM, MORALE, SPIRIT, ESPRIT DE CORPS . . . THE FEELING IS INFECTIOUS.

Enthusiasm is something very intangible. "Spirit. This is the first superficial characteristic. . . . I know reputations of the squadrons that I hear, and I know most of the COs on the base by virtue of my position. But the first thing that I see probably is the spirit. . . . I think that's the thing that holds people together when they're really under a lot of pressure." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) The senior officers also talked about the camaraderie in excellent squadrons. "Squadrons that do well in those exercises seem to have a lot of camaraderie and "esprit de corps." They feel comfortable with each other . . . and that all emanates from the leadership." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) Fellow shipmates helping each other, how does a command go about building that camaraderie? I was told that the commanding officer is the morale officer, he creates the morale in the squadron. He sets the example for the rest to follow. " . . . spirit of closeness within a squadron . . . generated I guess partially from the top, but it also permeates the squadron, not only in the officer ranks, but through the ranks. The ones that actually have fun at their All Hands parties. The ones that actually have fun sitting around a table with their chiefs, like at Chief Appreciation Night. The ones that obviously feel close to each other, they're a well knit organization, a compatible organization." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Although all of the

squadron skippers interviewed had different leadership styles, different traits, and different ways of doing things, I did notice that they all cared about the mission, command, and its people. The people, in turn cared about those same things. "Good morale in a squadron is a result of a good squadron, in other words, a squadron that is capable of performing its missions, that is well trained, and is well led. And out of that comes an "esprit" that generates morale. . . . I don't think good morale in a squadron can be carried over to make a good squadron. I think, it's probably got to be the other way around."

(SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

I noticed that all of the "excellent" skippers, when asked why they were excellent, gave credit to their people. None of them took personal credit for the fact that their squadrons were excellent. The squadrons were a tightly knit group. They had a team spirit and did things with gusto. "If your morale's high in the squadron, people are motivated. They want to work. . . . Disciplinary problems go down. . . . People are happy to come to work. They get the stuff done and do it right the first time so they don't have to redo it." (OFFICER) One of the skippers talked about "his" people. The skipper said he had insisted that his chiefs and officers wear winter working blue uniforms instead of the khaki uniforms during the winter months. When summer came, the chiefs and officers requested to wear

their whites on Fridays. They wanted to stand out from the other squadrons on base. "To have spirit, that's the thing that kind of set them apart. I guess that's what breaks out the excellent squadron." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

#### F. FIRST IMPRESSIONS HAVE A LASTING EFFECT.

All the senior officers talked about the first impressions that they get of a squadron. They indicated that when they first come onboard a squadron's quarterdeck they formulate an opinion about the squadron. "I can walk in the space and I can say hi to a sailor. I can tell from what kind of a response I get from that sailor, what the tone is here, morale-wise and otherwise." (SENIOR, CAPT, COMNAVAIR STAFF) As they proceed into the squadron's spaces these senior officers record the kind of reception they receive from the squadron personnel. "Initial impressions! Are they happy to see me? Are they pleased to show me their squadron? Do they go out of their way to tell me about things that they're doing, or, do you get, 'Well, what are you here for? Why are you here? What do you want to see? . . . Let's not show him into the XO's office.' It is a different attitude and approach." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO) They also look around at the spaces, subconsciously taking notes of the cleanliness, decor, and the state of the spaces (whether or not they need repair work.) "I'd go right straight up to the topside . . . and I'd look at the office space and ready room and just walk through there, drink a



cup of coffee, and stand around and look at the people. In 15 minutes, you can look at the ready room and see how it's laid out, what the guys there are talking about, what are people doing, the material condition of things, the deck. . . . It sets the tone in the squadron. If it looks like hell, that's what you've got." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) "A professionally run admin office is very obvious when you stick your head in." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Out on the flight line the senior officers note how orderly the hangar bays are and how well the people seem to be working together. "I can look at the airplane and tell you more about the squadron than anything else." (SENIOR, CAPT, COMNAVAIR STAFF) "Clean airplanes, that tells me something!" (SENIOR, CDR, COMNAVAIR STAFF) "If you crawl in the cockpit of an airplane that is filthy dirty, that tells you something. It shows me a lack of attention to detail." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) "And how they were doing it; whether or not they had drip pans all over the place and gear adrift or it was really tidy looking. Whether the airplanes looked like they were derelicts from the bone yard or looked like they had been carefully preserved. . . . Then I'd walk through maintenance control and see what kind of attitude was prevailing in there." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) When these officers glance out at the aircraft, they also take note as to how the planes are parked.



How the airplanes look. Are they clean? Are they well maintained? Are they parked in a row out there or are they kind of haphazard? . . . Do they look like they've been getting the proper attention and care? You can tell a lot by just walking around and looking at the spaces. Do they keep their spaces clean? . . . If you walk into a squadron and it's clean and neat, everything's in its place, everybody's charging around doing their job, yet everything's kept in a nice neat order, that tells me a lot. (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

One senior officer said he can tell a lot about the squadron when he sees the head the enlisted personnel use. All in all, these outward signs make a solid impression in the minds of these senior officers. "You can almost feel a squadron's good when you walk into its spaces." (SENIOR, CAPT, CNO STAFF)

During the interviews with the senior officers I developed a mental image of what the excellent squadrons would look like. After my visit to the first squadron, I was not disappointed. I kept recalling the words of the senior officers and seeing exactly that. The personnel were very pleasant and eager to talk to me about "their" squadrons. "Alertness! Alertness of the people, a sense that, 'Hey, I like my squadron. Maybe I can get you to come in and talk to me if I go up and talk to you.' That type thing." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) The spaces were neat and well kept. Some offices were older than others,<sup>8</sup> yet they were

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<sup>8</sup>Squadrons after returning from deployment do not return to the spaces they occupied before the deployment, therefore the squadron personnel do not have too much control over the

tastefully decorated and quite habitable. All of the squadrons had very impressive quarterdecks and passageways were well endowed with the squadron logo. Pride in the squadrons was evident from the freshly buffed decks to the cleanliness of their aircraft. The maintenance department was a hub of activity, yet it was not chaotic. The flight line was clear of F.O.D. and the planes were all lined up. The hangar bays were impressive. One had a white deck which was very impressive because it was so clean.<sup>9</sup> Every day I spent with these squadrons, I found myself wishing that I worked there.

In reviewing the transcripts from my interviews with the senior officers, I heard about the things they look for and what it means to them. The only way to give them justice is to present the quotes exactly as I heard them.

I think I can get a clue as to how well the squadron is sincere about things by how well they groom their EW equipment. EW equipment is expensive equipment in the airplane. It's something that is notoriously neglected until the second day of the war. . . . So if you're sincere about being ready to fight a war, then you've got to continue to maintain that system. And it's an indicator because it's a hard thing to do. It takes that little extra effort and that's an indication of excellence in my estimation. (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

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condition of the spaces or office furniture that they inherit.

<sup>9</sup>Most hangar bay decks I have seen are painted deck gray.

Maintain the airplanes. Keeping them in top shape. The spaces the same way. We have frequent barracks inspections and that's always an indicator of a command. When we go through and see a particular squadron having repeated problems in the barracks either keeping the spaces clean or misconduct, that's an indicator to me about the leadership in that squadron. Either the master chief isn't on top of the situation or the XO's not on top of it. And the other side of that coin would be, no problems in that squadron, so you know that they're getting frequently inspected and are getting taken care of. (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

First impressions are important. Cleanliness, courtesy . . . walk into the duty office and look at the schedule board. We're talking about airplanes. Is the board being filled in in a normal fashion based on the printed flight schedule? Or are there a lot of changes, that perhaps don't make any sense, being communicated? (SENIOR, FLAG, WING)

In maintenance, talk to them. I get a feel for how they feel about the job that they're doing and how important it is. Plane captains, for instance, they'll brief me. They do all the air crews and we walk out to the airplane and view the condition of the airplane.

Although I heard about working on the EW equipment, the barracks inspections and the schedule board mentioned only once, I think, as one senior officer presented earlier, it takes balance. Whatever the particular senior officer knew well, was interested in or had had problems with in the past, was the area he spoke most about and was also the area he noticed in the squadrons. "How is this squadron handling that?" Those excellent squadrons have balance. They know that everything plays into the picture they paint of themselves. One officer sums it up best. "Got to create a good impression . . . like when there's a big command

meeting someplace else on base, you don't show up ten minutes late. . . . Nothing gets sent out late, paperwork wise or administrative functions. . . . Everything you do, you try to do to the absolute best of your ability, be it flying, writing evals, or doing turnarounds on an aircraft." (OFFICER) "It's that little extra effort. It seems like a little extra effort when it's probably a lot of effort. So it's an overall perception of the sharpness of the squadron." (SENIOR, CDR, CNO STAFF)

#### G. GOALS AND MISSION; WHERE IS THE SQUADRON HEADING?

Senior officers talked at length about goals. "I evaluate it by setting goals and seeing what success either an organization or an individual has in meeting those goals." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) They explained that the squadron skipper must have realistic goals. It is imperative that these goals be attainable and give room for the squadron to stretch. "Set their goals high enough . . . you've got to set your goals." "Well focused!" (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) Goals must be specific and everybody must know what they are. "A specific set of guidelines that will allow everybody in the command to communicate properly and to understand why those goals and how you're going to accomplish those goals." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) They must be focused and easily understood. "A squadron that's going someplace is fairly well focused and the people that are on board are happy because things are well defined. They have



specific objectives and when they meet them, they get positive reinforcements." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) Yet, goals must be flexible enough to allow last minute changes to schedules. The squadron skippers further stated that goalsetting must be something each individual in the squadron takes a part in. "I'm saying this relaxness [SIC] and it's a dumb word but a climate or environment that engenders the warm caring way, engenders a lot of discussion, and participation. The participation is necessary in the sense that a mission is talked about. Everybody has to have a sense of participation. That's a required tenet in any successful squadron." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) The squadron feels secure and happy when they know where the squadron is headed. They like to know what is expected of them and what they can expect of the squadron. Some of the sailors attribute their excellence to this fact. "This squadron's always had a direction and a route to follow. It never has been kind of drifting along and reacting. . . . It's always been well prepared well in advance of whatever." (SAILOR) "They came out right at the very beginning and said, 'These are my expectations. These are my goals. This is the way I want certain things done, list of goals, command policy. This is what I expect.'" (SAILOR) The CO sets the goals and policies. The XO, myself, and everybody, carry it out. We've been under the



guidance of recognizing and appreciating people. It's a little bit of appreciation that goes a long way." (SAILOR)

A CO said: "Proper emphasis and proper priorities were set and word really filtered down. People knew why we were doing what we were doing." Another skipper said that he realized his squadron was not setting goals: "So we started becoming very goal oriented and we went through a management by objectives program where we get all the department heads [together] and we looked six months ahead of time."

Also of importance is the mission of the squadron. "Squadron's mission. If the mission is to fly whatever kind of sorties they're supposed to be flying and the training they're supposed to be accomplishing, then they must be doing that effectively. Set some goals. Coming close to meeting those goals, . . . regularly and with a good attitude." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO) The squadron leaders must clearly explain the squadron's mission to all those involved. Some senior officers find that goals and mission are very closely related, nearly indistinguishable. "Start with professionalism. You have to start with mission orientation, because you don't have any camaraderie if you don't have a definite goal and objective, a mission . . . " (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) How to carry through with the mission in the most effective way and lead to the attainment of a goal? The key, according to the senior officers, seems to be to "Get people focused in the right direction." (SENIOR,

CAPT, WING STAFF) "Initially sit with them and let them know where you're all headed and just kind of encourage them to follow along. . . . Then feedback to help them." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) "Set the direction where you want to go with the squadron. That has to be very, very eagerly infused at all levels in the command, . . . specific directions. . . . Get them herded up and pointed in that direction [the same one the CO is headed in] . . . a positive direction in the command, which, I think, emanates from the top. I find that that's probably the most influential ingredient as far as the success of the command." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

H. HUSTLING, AGGRESSIVENESS; THE INITIATIVE TO TAKE A RISK AND MAKE A DECISION

Aggressiveness was an element which all senior officers talked about. "My personal view of excellence is a squadron or an individual where nothing is too hard, no matter what is is. They're going to give you their best shot and when I tell them what I need, they're going to figure out a way to get that goal for me." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) It is imperative for an excellent squadron to have an aggressive skipper. It is also necessary to have aggressive key people. The aggressive squadrons take initiative to do things they were not directed to do. "Willing to try harder and work harder than the average squadron." (SENIOR, CDR, CNO STAFF) They set high standards for themselves to help keep them hustling and stretching to excel. These squadrons

will volunteer for whatever comes up, be it extra flights, or working in the community. "You get out and you volunteer for every project that comes up. . . . Volunteer our services . . . so we've got this reputation now, that if somebody needs a . . . little job done, they'll come to us first because we'll do it as best we can. So what you get is a real 'go for it' reputation and that's one of the ways the squadron gets this reputation." (OFFICER)

#### I. INTEGRATED UNITS--TEAMWORK

Working together in harmony is basically what the senior officers termed teamwork. What I saw was exactly what they said and more. I saw different divisions finishing up their own work only to scurry out and help another division finish its work too. "I see a lot of ATs helping AQs and help the other shops when they've got the extra time or they really need the help." (SAILOR)

The other thing that is kind of pleasing, and I don't really understand how it works, because I didn't have anything to do with it, is that once in a while if a shop gets far enough behind, the other shops will come in to support them. I'm liable to have an AE coming in to help a mech change an engine. And I don't know how that works. I can't honestly explain that. That's a phenomenon that goes beyond my capacity to understand. But it happens in this squadron. The whole squadron won't let someone get that far behind the eight ball. They just won't allow it, which obviously is a source of pride or pride drives that, but I don't understand how you get to that point in the command. I'm not sure a CO could cause it, other than, it's a side effect. (SKIPPER)

We saw shops working together to resolve gripes. "You don't hear in this squadron like you do in the other squadrons, 'Ah, their operations [department is] screwing us again,' or if you work in maintenance, 'Get out of here,'. We'll hear some of that teasing but it's not what I've seen in past squadrons." (SAILOR) "I see clear division in work but I see everybody crossing the line to help their buddy. . . . Strong leadership characteristics in even the junior troops. And the reason for that is, that the senior troops, chiefs and senior officers, have extremely strong leadership characteristics. The best is demanded and the best comes out." (OFFICER) I saw "troops" proudly wearing their squadrons' ball cap and belt buckles. The example of the uniform cited in the enthusiasm section displayed a sense of unity and teamwork. From their conversations with and about each other, I discerned a loyalty amongst the sailors for each other and their squadron. "Maybe it's because we're a team. There's no one certain group of people that stands out from everybody else, we're all in it." (SAILOR) I observed what looked and felt like a family. "They work together at work and also after work. They go to each others' house for dinner or they go play tennis or golf or whatever. It's not just an at work thing." (SAILOR) "There's good relationships between all ranks. I believe everyone in this squadron gets along good with everybody else, it's like a family." (SAILOR) "A lot of outfits that



you work with, you just basically work with the people and that's as far as it goes. Here, it's more like family. And people really get along well with each other and when you do, work is a lot better. People take pride in it."

(SAILOR) I saw people caring for their shipmates and their shipmates' families. "Concern for people is really important. I think, before anything is done in our squadron, somebody raises their hand and says, what's it going to do to those guys over there." (SAILOR) "The teamwork, I like the way they look out for you. Try to push the schools and stuff like that." (SAILOR) I saw effectiveness and happiness through working together. "I'm the drug and alcohol guy and the safety guy . . . and I've never gotten anything but cooperation out of the personnel in admin." (OFFICER) "The camaraderie in the squadron and hearing different people in different squadrons talk about the cliques that they find going on. I can't see that in our squadron." (SAILOR) "A bombing derby, it's a team effort." (SAILOR) "We continue to tell them [support people during and after an air competition] how well they did in supporting us." (SAILOR) I saw people with a healthy respect for each other. "People willing to help. It's a real comfortable place to work. You want to work. People will go out of their way." (SAILOR)

Another characteristic about excellent squadrons described by the senior officers was the fact that they are



always eager to help other squadrons when they can. "Some Interrelationships between squadrons that I've observed squadrons in the past. . . . Very aloof! 'I've got mine, don't bother me.' While others, 'Sure CO, XO, come on over, yeah, I think we've got a good thing going here. Why don't you guys see if you want to copy it.'" (SENIOR, FLAG WING)

#### J. JUNIOR OFFICER AND ENLISTED RAPPORT

The leadership of the CO will have a lot to do with cohesiveness. . . . Then the quality and the caliber of the officers that you have on board at any one time. I've seen squadrons where the pilots don't talk to the RIOs [Radio Intercept Officer]. Tremendous division between pilots and the NFOs [Naval Flight Officer] and I've seen squadrons where you can't tell the difference between pilots and RIOs because they're such a tight group. And that's the squadron that excels. . . . One of the things that helps to promote that is the social gatherings of the squadron officer corps. (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

That's probably where we excel more than the average group around here. We get out and do things out of the squadron. . . . We'll have a party once a month and usually more than that. I'm not saying that having a bunch of parties is the key, but being together socially. . . . (SAILOR)

Plus, we do things as a group and the squadron as a whole does things; ski trips to Canada or going to Seattle together. Whatever you want to do and as a squadron. We do things together, therefore, it's a team. (SAILOR)

There exists, in these squadrons, a mutual respect among groups, i.e., the junior officers and the enlisted personnel and the chiefs. The junior officers treat each individual with the dignity they deserve. The junior officers work at

being part of the same team as the enlisted people. The enlisted people do the same. "When it's a maintenance work weekend, I've never failed to see the junior officers above us, right here in their spaces working right along with us. That gained a great deal of my respect, because I know that it's not just me [working], and they're going out and having fun on weekends. It's everybody here working together as a team to get the job done. To do what's required." (SAILOR)

In essence, there is no class difference, yet the military distinction between officers, chiefs and enlisted is not jeopardized. People are very professional in handling the differences in their rank structure. Junior officers give credit to the knowledge possessed by the enlisted "troops" and the enlisted personnel reciprocate. There is an air of respect. "It's an atmosphere around here. Whatever you can do to mold that atmosphere. It definitely involves a liaison between the Os [officers] and the troopers. . . . "

(OFFICER) The lack of military "class" distinction that exists in these squadrons also carries over into the wives' clubs. The CO's and XO's wives attend the enlisted wives' club meetings. People treat each other as the valuable people they really are, without regard to their paygrades.

## K. KEY PEOPLE IN KEY POSITIONS LEAD THE WAY

Key people are the backbone of the squadron according to senior officers, skippers, and execs. "Key people, hand picked people in key positions. That's really a clue, hand picked people in key positions. . . . All be front runners." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) "The trick is to get good people and then turn them loose. . . . He [the CO] gets good people, he lets them know that he trusts them." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) One key individual is the squadron's maintenance chief. He is of prime importance because of the influence he has on all the squadron personnel. "You [also] need a dynamite maintenance officer . . . [as well as] a dynamite maintenance control officer. You need the best maintenance control chiefs working the desk, in the work [place]. If those guys are key, then everything else will start coming together for you." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

The commanding officer is the backbone of the squadron. He is the most influential player in the squadron. The XO is the next critical player. Several senior officers said that both the maintenance and the operations officers were positions of extreme responsibility and needed to be filled by "front-runners." Two of the four skippers interviewed specifically mentioned recruiting their enlisted personnel.

I think that, if you sit back, and allow the Navy's personnel system to give you the people they feel you're owed, you won't do as well as if you go out and actively seek out certain people to come to your organization. We do a lot of heavy recruiting in terms of going

over . . . to the placement squadrons . . . and getting people . . . we feel we need, in key positions, such as, first class and chiefs, sometimes second class, but the senior enlisted cadre of people that really make a difference downstairs. Make a difference in a couple of ways; they produce good safe up airplanes number one, and number two, those are generally also people whose subordinates enjoy working for them. They create an atmosphere downstairs, that's conducive to making a good squadron. (SKIPPER)

I think we go out looking for key people more aggressively than a lot of other people. . . . You really ought to use your credits to getting the key enlisted guys. . . . If you don't have a good maintenance chief or command master chief you're probably out of business. . . . I've checked on personalities, I call the training command a couple of times a day to check on the guy. Is this the kind of guy who'd fit in here? (SKIPPER)

Some of the squadrons recruit their key people from the RAG<sup>10</sup> and others felt that it was not necessary, home grown was the way to go. Although not every squadron actively recruited, each did take an active interest in the RAG personnel and who was transferring and when they leaving the RAG.

Additionally important is the need for people in the squadron to have diverse backgrounds. As one skipper explained it, with people of different backgrounds working in the squadron, the squadron will then have a wider range of expertise available to it. "You sit back with an average

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<sup>10</sup>Replacement Air Group also known as Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS), is a training command for pilots/RIOS/BN and maintenance "troops".



can of people. If you get to make any calls on the shots, worry about their backgrounds. Worry about where they come from and keep that as spread out as you can. . . . That's far more important than worrying about getting a very narrow group of people who are all extremely capable but they're only as good as their training and they're limited by where they've been."

L. LEADERSHIP; JOHN WAYNE IN EVERY RESPECT!

Leadership is one of those global words that encompasses a wide range of things. Every one of the senior officers mentioned this subject and each one's definition of leadership was a little different. "Good old fashioned leadership. People should treat people with respect. You don't want to take peoples' self respect away from them." (SENIOR, CAPT, SECNAV STAFF) Some other noteworthy aspects of leadership that the senior officers described follows. Leaders set examples for their "troops" to follow. "It's setting the example and maintaining it from the top down. . . . You have to insist that things be done properly. Properly meaning in the proper procedures of say an inspection, a safety inspection or a maintenance inspection. That you demand that the people follow the written procedures verbatim, no shortcuts." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO) The key leaders of the squadron give direction and head in that direction themselves, expecting that their "troops" will follow. They spend time on important things,



which means their people. They recognize their people for the things they do and give them credit for jobs well done. "He shows acceptance of his people, acceptance of their work." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) They take an interest in what is going on in the life of each individual, not to extremes, but basically, knowing if there are personal problems at home. Good leaders visit the spaces frequently and are in touch with what is going on, even at the lowest levels. "Mobile, move around. Talk to your people." (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF) They build the team. They emphasize the importance of each individual. "It's a good, positive and strong, involved leader that is the prime mover. . . . I would say the most important trait of all is a genuine caring spirit." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) One senior officer talked about how one day he found a sailor making salad in the galley. The sailor was using rotten tomatoes. The skipper explained to the sailor that he was an integral part in the morale of the command. If he produced a salad with rotten tomatoes, the command personnel would begin berating the food onboard the ship and the morale would decrease. The sailor realized the integral part he plays on his team. "To have a person in charge, and that person has got to pull everything he can out of everybody that works for him in that organization." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Leaders need to be consistent in their treatment of personnel. "To gain the confidence in his people." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING

STAFF) They need to be fair and often times creative to catch the attention of their personnel. "I always champion imagination." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) "Strong COs seem to be able to surround themselves with good people. Maybe it's the fact that a strong CO is able to pull the best out of his people." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

From the "troops" I learned that the skipper needs to be the best. Only when he is the best can the "troops" be the best. They feel that they reflect his excellence.

While visiting the squadrons I heard from the skippers the same things I had heard from the senior officers. Additionally I heard from the "troops" that their skippers did practice all of these things. They respected their skipper and wanted to be loyal to him. They were proud of the things he did.

I think that a command is really going to put forth an effort when they have a lot of respect in the men at the top. Both men [the two previous skippers] are extremely professional and they were competent. They set goals and they demanded, they really demanded, of us, the same kind of professionalism and expertise and quality that gave them the edge. It wasn't done in a tyrannical way, but rather, "Look at the success that I've had with this. This is my personality. These are the things that have made me the way I am." When you look at that man and you respect him, you aspire to be like him, then you just naturally can't help but give 100% or 110% or even more. It becomes easy to make sacrifices for this man because he represents the command and you respect that man as an individual. (SAILOR)

The skippers readily admitted that they were human and subject to making mistakes. This is one reason they value

the opinions of their people. They also said that it was important to admit their mistakes to the "troops". The troops need to know that sometimes the "old man" goofed. They can respect him more if he admits the mistake, than if he covers it up.

It was unanimous that leadership from the top was critical. I have mentioned in several other sections that the skipper is the person with the vision, the direction, the example. Here I can only mention it again. The senior officers stressed this fact. "First gear is the CO. And I don't think there's any way you can talk or walk around the fact that the CO is going to be the guy who takes the first breath to blow this bubble or this aura that formulates the mental attitude, the mind set, of the squadron. He firmly establishes the goals of that command and then all you do is go about achieving those goals." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

The officers of the squadron said the same and even the enlisted people let me know that they looked up to the skipper for direction and guidance. "Definitive leadership. I'd rather work for a guy who makes me do something crazy than somebody that is wishy-washy. It's so easy to predict a guy who's definitive in what he does all the time."

(SAILOR)

The CO and XO must communicate to the squadron clear and concise command philosophy. They must insure that everyone knows where the squadron is heading, where the skipper

stands on certain issues and what is expected of them. "The people have to know that if they take care of me, and me being my squadron, I'm going to take care of them."

(SKIPPER) The skipper needs to keep a pulse on all of this without micromanaging.

[COs and XO of excellent squadrons] have a knack for knowing everything that's going on without making it appear like they're micromanaging. The skipper will be in the ready room and he'll meet the flight when they come back in. He'll just talk to them and find out what they did and how their systems worked, how their tactics worked. It makes it appear to the air crews that it's a matter of his interest more than it is a matter of his checking on them. He's not micromanaging them, he's getting their inputs and their help to form tactics, their participation . . . that's good effective communication. (SENIOR, FLAG, WING)

All the skippers interviewed practiced MBWA<sup>11</sup>

The skippers all agreed that in order to gain credibility in their squadrons they needed to be consistent. "The other thing that helps is that the command hierarchy in the chain must be predictable. It doesn't make any difference how irrational the CO or XO are. They have to do the same action twice. Whatever they do they can't keep changing the rules on the guys. So everytime you make a decision to do something you therefore have to say in that decision, 'What precedent am I setting because I'm going to eat it for the next three years.' As long as you are

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<sup>11</sup>Managing by Wandering Around, a term identified by Peters and Waterman in their book In Search of Excellence.



consistent, everyone in the command realizes that they can count on that and they respond to it." (SKIPPER) People need to know that the skipper is fair and that if they make a mistake, they will be treated fairly.

If we have an incident, for instance, we run two airplanes together while parking them, we obviously made a mistake. We can't get too excited about the incident at the moment. You have to take one step at a time, sort it out. Figure out whether there was any maliciousness involved. Our rule with the guys out there, no matter what major infraction there is, there will be a urinalysis check. I've told them all many times at quarters, if they are high on drugs and they are making mistakes, I don't feel the taxpayer, me, or anybody else ought to pay for that. But if it's an honest mistake they needn't have any fear from me. I can tolerate an honest mistake once in a while. There isn't anybody perfect in this community, especially me. (SKIPPER)

One young sailor, only a few weeks in the squadron, said the thing he liked best about his squadron was that they treated him like a person, ". . . they let you make mistakes!" Some skippers talked about mistakes and how one learns from them. As long as one learns from one's mistakes, it was OK; if the same mistakes occurred again, BEWARE! Another trait of the commanding officer was his creativity. The senior officers noted that the CO must be creative. The skippers said the same thing. One skipper shared this story.

We had what I thought was a little sloppiness in the watch business. Guys were coming to watch ten to twenty minutes late. They weren't challenging everyone on the line for an ID card. Little things that weren't as professional as I wanted. The first couple that came to XO screening and mast, I instituted a dollar a minute fine. It didn't make any difference whether the kid was



ten minutes late, 30 minutes late or four hours late, it cost them a dollar a minute. And everyone that came to mast knew it. The first time we did that, the word shot across the squadron like wildfire. We've stuck with that for three years. . . . So that's consistent, everybody in the command knows it. It knocked down the number of UA's and minor infractions in the command to zero almost immediately and it's been that way since. It doesn't have to be an irrational act, but it needs to be predictable and consistent and what the guys see as fair.

M. AS MAINTENANCE GOES, SO GOES THE SQUADRON

"So goes the maintenance effort of the squadron, so goes the squadron. if the maintenance is up, the people are up, the airplanes are up. If that's all up, then the flight hours are up. The crews are happy that they're flying well and the training is high." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) "When you go through the maintenance control area that's assigned for your airplane, you can sense the attitude of the people in there. They're very happy working there or they're not happy working there." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

The department in a squadron which has the greatest influence on the squadron is the maintenance department. The senior officers could not stress often enough how critical this department is. It contains the majority of the squadron's enlisted personnel (about 90%.) It has the most critical job, keeping the airplanes in good operating condition. Without maintenance a squadron cannot achieve its mission. "Maintenance is the heart of the squadron. . . . The guy who keeps the heart going is the skipper." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) I was told over and

over again that the maintenance department needs to be solid and competent. An excellent squadron will have a very efficient and capable maintenance department. "Your excellent squadrons will always rise to the top in the maintenance area." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING)

In the interviews with the COs and XO's they repeated the words of their seniors. Without their maintenance department they could not be excellent. The maintenance department is the hub of activity. It is there that everything starts and ends, from inspecting the aircraft for flight certification, to repairs when the plane is "down", to just maintaining it in good operating condition. When I visited the squadrons I realized it was not only the senior officers who acknowledged the importance of maintenance. Just about every sailor, whether he was a part of maintenance or not, was aware that maintenance was an important department and the men in that department were doing one important job. "What's the number one characteristic in the squadron? Probably the way they conduct their maintenance." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING)

#### N. NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE BOTH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

The senior officers also talked about the importance of taking care of your people. "Getting to know the whole individual is what builds the cohesiveness . . . and that also includes the enlisted people most assuredly." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) Every senior officer we interviewed felt

that this was of primary importance. "Care about their welfare." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) They explained that it was critical for the command to take care of their sailors and help them resolve any problems so the sailors could take care of the command without being preoccupied with their problems. It is important to try to meet the needs of your people. They need to be treated as human beings and be respected.

I think retention is a fallout from all these things we're talking about. If people feel good about coming to work every day, they're going to want to stay around. If people feel that their leaders care about them; where they sleep, where they eat and where they spend their nights, where they go on liberty and who they spend their time with. If people feel that other people involved have a genuine caring spirit about them both at work and away from work, if they genuinely feel that, it can't be somebody going through the motions because they've read it. It must be genuine. (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

The skippers could not be more in agreement. They reiterated everything the senior officers had said and then they went into details.

You've got to take care of your people. . . . I'm no dummy. I realize that I'm not going to make one damn bit of difference in the squadron unless the people that are in the squadron have some faith in me and some faith in the squadron and are actively interested in getting the job done. And that's why I'm trying to get them so involved in the goals. So they understand when they look at a flight schedule and they're out there working on an airplane. They understand that that airplane has to be fixed so we can complete this particular mission, this particular sortie. So I think it's extremely important to really hand massage the youngsters. (SKIPPER)

They talked about the families and stressed the fact that if the families were not happy with the Navy and the squadron, chances are that the sailor would not be happy either. The skippers take great pains to include the entire families, that is, wives, moms, dads, siblings, aunts, uncles, etc. Should relatives of the squadron members desire to see what the work spaces look like, the skipper and his representatives welcome these family members with open arms. The invitation is open to the families of everyone in the squadron both officer and enlisted. And the squadron members like this. It gives them a sense of pride. The skippers also talked about how they take special effort to keep the families informed about everything that is going on in the command. They try to keep the families posted on the pre-deployment schedule. When the squadron is deployed, the command takes an active interest in helping the family back home. It is difficult for the "troops" to give their full attention to the details of repairing aircraft if they are worried about their wives and children back home. The squadron goes out of its way to impress the wives, both officer and enlisted, that they, too, are an important part of the team. The skipper uses his admin officer for direct liaison with the wives. He schedules and coordinates professional training for them at their regular meetings, as well as briefing them on important past and upcoming events.



You have to care about your people. If you don't care about your people, then you're not going to work together as a team. You're not [going] to have the unit integrity. I don't think it's any one thing. It's a combination of everybody working together and not a mutual admiration society. Respect for each other. As long as you have the respect, then it paid [sic] off for us. We're a great association. It's the people. It's the troops. It's the men, they're the ones that make it. Without their efforts, we wouldn't be where we are, and we appreciate their efforts, and they see that and they know. . . . (OFFICER)

Professional needs are equally important. The command takes an active interest in each sailor. "A CO should never miss an opportunity to recognize an award for outstanding performance by his individuals, be it at quarters, medals . . . any pat on the back goes a long way." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) The skipper encourages the division officers, the chiefs and the career counselor to help their people insure that all qualifications are met and all the paperwork is in when it is time for a sailor to be promoted. "I find in talking to other people, if you want to go to school or if you want to do some extra curricular activity, most of the shops will go out of their way to let you do that. If it means trading your shift you're working on so you can do that, or giving you some time off to do it, gives you more like the squadron cares attitude. I noticed that about three months after I came to this squadron." (SAILOR) The career counselors that I met were very people oriented. They enjoyed their work and were eager to show me some of the "little" things they do for the "troops", such as the

monthly bulletins they put out and the assorted merchandise containing the squadron logo which they distribute. Each one of these counselors approached their work in different ways, yet each one insured that the people in the command were well informed about the requirements needed to go up for advancement. In addition, the career counselors personally knew each individual and whenever some tidbit of information was gleaned that could be of benefit to one of the "troops", the career counselor passed on the information. There was a comfortable feeling in their offices, where I interviewed them. The bantering and kidding that went on between the career counselor and the "troops" as they strolled in, gave me the feeling of being amongst a family.

#### O. OPERATIONAL READINESS IS ACHIEVING THE MISSION

Along with taking care of the people as primary importance, all the senior officers emphasized that the operational readiness of the squadron was paramount. If a squadron could not put their bombs or missiles on target then they were not performing their mission. Every senior officer said excellent squadrons are the ones who can meet their commitments. They are the ones who have a good sortie completion rate. They put their bombs and missiles on target. They are very professional on the radio and are well disciplined when in the aircraft. In other words, they are ready to fight the war today. The excellent squadrons

echoed this urgency. Their number one goal was to be ready to fight the war. They were equally aware of the paramount importance of operational readiness. They approached it from the point of view of being part of the team. If the bombs or missiles were not on target, the fault did not lie with the aircrew alone. Every member of the team took the hit.

"Accomplishment of the mission is the first evaluation; how you accomplish that . . . put the bombs on target . . . and sortie rates. Make sure that you're getting the mission accomplished that you're assigned. . . . All of the known commitments throughout your training and deployment cycle, how well do you meet those challenges and how well are you prepared to meet those challenges from a training standpoint." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO)

#### P. PRIDE AND PROFESSIONALISM

From the senior officers I heard that people in excellent squadrons are very professional in their personal demeanor. This professionalism is obvious to these senior officers from the moment they walk onboard the quarterdeck; in the cleanliness, the neatness, the people. The people quickly and happily greet strangers and try in earnest to help them. They are eager to talk about their squadrons and their achievements. The success of the bombing runs are shared by all members and the failures are equally shared.

What did these squadrons look like? Well I did not hear any radio conversations so I cannot confirm what some senior officers had described as professionalism on the radio, but I can say that the hangars and work spaces were the cleanest I have ever visited. The "troops" were courteous and eager to speak about "their" squadrons. "Basically we do everything timely in an accurate manner, we take pride in our jobs. I think that shows that we are the best, as long as we do things that way." (SAILOR) There was very little grumbling from any of the "troops" I spoke with and I spoke with people chosen at random. They were eager to tell stories about their squadrons and not in a braggart way. One young sailor told about the time his squadron went to El Centro. Everyone had worked really hard, following all procedures in order to maintain the aircraft. And all the planes were "up." Compared with the other squadrons in El Centro at that time, this squadron was the only one with all of its planes up. They were proud of that fact and their attitude reflected this pride. It is obvious to me that these people like themselves, their squadrons and their fellow workers. They have a "Go get her" attitude and are proud to be a small part of their squadron. When they do something, they take pride in doing it right, the first time. They showed respect for each other. There is a lot of pride and professionalism in the quality of their work, and they stand behind what they do. "I'd say there's quite



a few people that really know their rates and jobs well and they have the desire to do that job as best as they can. . . . Self pride." (SAILOR) The officers spoke well of the enlisted members and the enlisted folks spoke well of the officers. Each looked beyond the rank to the person and treated them as people worthy of respect.

One skipper described his people as working "with class."

Everything they do, they just do with such style and class and get the job done. They don't bicker with anybody. They know where they are. It's one thing to get on top, it's another thing to stay on top. And they have done it and they are doing it. . . . My definition of class is a guy that does it as well if not better than anybody else and makes it look easy; that seldom loses his temper, is cool, calm, professional doesn't sweat the small stuff. [He] lets the people that work for him do the job they're supposed to do and never over-reacts. (SKIPPER)

"The ability to share and the ability to interrelate with other squadrons. . . . You're still competitive but someone needs help. that person, that group will be the first to extend it." (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF)

In summary, they look good, feel good about themselves, go out of their way to help their shipmates, both within the squadron and outside the squadron, their attitude is noticeable to everyone, they treat other people, both senior and junior to them, with dignity and respect and it seems that this type of behavior once started becomes infectious. Maybe it is a positive reinforcement kind of peer pressure.

Whatever it is, once it has permeated the squadron, it affects anyone who comes onboard. "If you've got a very professionally oriented squadron, you've got a squadron that's got good morale and that'll show also." (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF)

Q. QUALITY; WE ARE THE BEST!

Quality is a very encompassing word and that is just exactly how it was meant in describing these squadrons. The senior officers said that quality permeates the excellent squadrons. They do not do anything mediocre. "Whenever you do something, your main goal is to do it to the best of your ability and when . . . the inspectors tell you you're doing that, it makes your job worthwhile." (SAILOR) Everything they produce is top quality. "This is the second year in a row that we've been through an admat where both sides, administrative and personnel were outstanding. He [inspector] couldn't find any discrepancies . . . that makes us all feel good and lets us know we're doing our jobs right." (SAILOR) From the flight hours they fly, to the maintenance they do, to the paperwork, everything has a stamp of quality on it. The paperwork is done thoroughly, completely, the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. It is thorough, logical and in the Navy vernacular. It is in the right format, has content, good structure (message, speed letter or regular correspondence). It is always on time. "If it's worth doing then it's worth doing right. If

you don't do it right . . . then I think you probably wouldn't do it right turning a wrench. . . . It all ties itself together. . . . It's attention to detail." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) They meet all their deadlines. Their people are well taken care of when it comes to evaluation and fitness report time. All evaluations and fitness reports are sent to Bupers ahead of the deadlines. Sailors due for advancement, are helped to insure that all paperwork is completed and turned in, so there will not be a technical delay in their advancement. "It's very easy to spot the professional administrator in work that comes through, because it makes the non-professional . . . attempts at writing letters look so much worse." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) Not only did the senior officers find this achievement necessary, but so did the skippers and execs. They talked about the expectations they have of their people. "We all look at the sortie completion rates. We look at the grades that the squadrons have achieved in OREs [Operational Readiness Exercises] and things. Of course, those squadrons that have achieved the highest marks in all of those areas are what you would call the top notch squadrons." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) "We are [the best]. That and the leadership we have around here. They don't take second best. You do it good. There's no slacking off on

the job or anything like that. You just get out there and get it done. If it's there to be done, it's getting done!" (OFFICER)

#### R. REPUTATION OF THE SQUADRON AND THE SKIPPER

Reputation precedes all the other contacts a person will have with a squadron. A reputation becomes a first impression for anyone who has not had prior contact with a squadron. "If you get started on the wrong foot, you give yourself a bad reputation. It's hard to overcome." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) For those who have had contact with the squadron, the reputation merely validates their impressions. "Has a lot to do with a professional type reputation and how others see them." (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF) How do the squadrons get the job done? Can they be counted on to do the job accurately and on time? Can they be trusted? Who do you call first when you need someone to do a job? They have a reputation for quality. They do their work with "class." Once someone from outside the squadron meets up with the squadron, they remember the airplanes, the cleanliness, the quality of the work, everything. Reputation can be thought of as a batting average or a track record. Has the squadron performed well in the past? Can it be expected to do a good job? The senior officers made it clear that not only was the squadron's reputation important, but so was the reputation of the man running the show, the commanding officer. "They [COs of excellent



squadron] have reputations of professional excellence . . . so they have credibility. You combine that with the trust and confidence that they place in their people and that their people feel that they're placing in them, and you have a combination that's very effective." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) Be advised that it was not only his professional reputation that was being scrutinized, but also his personal reputation. Senior officers feel that a squadron reflects its skipper. They hold a lot of stock in the man at the top.

#### S. SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE

Excellent squadrons are consistent high performers. "Sustained performance . . . sustained performance over the long haul is the key that measures, that breaks out one outfit over another." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO) The squadrons can be depended upon to get the job done correctly, thoroughly and timely. "Ability to consistently perform its mission, respond to the pre-planned, or not pre-planned at all, tasking laid upon it." (SENIOR, CDR, CNO STAFF) They especially have solid maintenance practices all the time. One way that the senior officers can test this sustained performance is by evaluating the question "If the CO leaves, will the place fall apart?" With excellent squadrons, although the CO is a key person and he sets the tone,

atmosphere and standards for the squadron, even if he is away, the squadron will operate without going into crisis mode.

#### T. TRAINING - INSPECTIONS

". . . the best squadrons are led by the best people in the world who believe in training as the answer to all your problems." (SENIOR, CAPT, CHIEF OF STAFF)

The senior officers did not mention much about the subject of training, but the squadron skippers did. They talked about the importance of keeping everybody informed about the systems, weapons, and aircraft. They realize the purpose of training and use it to its maximum advantage. They train religiously. They allow their "troops" to train on the job or away at schools as necessary, and they insure that there is sufficient training time set aside each week. One skipper said that the day set aside for training was rarely, if ever, changed. Only critical unplanned missions pre-empted training.

It seem that these squadrons have an attitude that there is something to be learned from every experience. They look forward to visits from inspectors and greet them with the attitude "What can I learn from you?" "I always liked to see inspectors and visitors come from outside, come and take a look at us, no matter whether they found a problem or not. If they found a problem, something that was wrong, then we needed to know about it. We needed to correct that problem.

It was an attitude that we were happy to see people come. We were happy to see inspectors come." (SENIOR, CAPT, BASE CO) One skipper talked about inspections. He felt that inspections were great and he encouraged his seniors to come and inspect the squadron. "If there's an event that's a known or going to be a special outside activity, we rehearse to make sure it's going to be right." (SKIPPER) To him an inspection was more training. It was showing him where he needed to concentrate his efforts. As mentioned before, I visited one squadron the same day they were scheduled for a personnel inspection. Prior to the inspection, the personnel were working as usual. There was not that usual tension one feels prior to a major inspection. While the inspection was going on, I interviewed one of the sailors who had been assigned to man the phones and skip inspection. He told me that he found out just a few minutes before inspection that he would not be standing it. He said that he was a little disappointed because he was proud to stand inspection. He told me that he had worked hard at polishing his shoes and getting his uniform just right. This was an impressive attitude. "People from our shop really care. . . . A guy that goes out on the airplane, they're not just keeping up with the training records, they're making sure the guy knows his real job and that he can sign that work off and . . . get it right when it's done." (SAILOR)

"The squadrons that are having no problems with the missile shoot, the weaponry exercises, "no notice" things, they're the ones that do the extra things to extend themselves. . . . They do some cross training with the airports, the extra things that are fun, that are enjoyable, that are tremendous training. Those are a mark of excellence." (SENIOR, CDR, RAG CO)

#### U. UP GRIPEs

Several officers mentioned the number of "up" gripe<sup>12</sup> that a squadron carries in the Aircraft Discrepancy Book (ADB),<sup>13</sup> as an indicator of an exceptional squadron. In each case they said that the number of "up" gripe reflects whether the maintenance department is willing to put forth that extra effort to have the aircraft fully "up". "What kind of maintenance goes on? How many up gripe are in the book? How many of them are corrosion gripe? This tells me what they're paying attention to." (SENIOR, CAPT, COMNAVAIR STAFF) They all agreed that it is hard enough to keep the basic systems such as the engines, airframe and hydraulic systems up, but the status of those systems that are not routinely used on each flight is a good indicator of

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<sup>12</sup>When some of the equipment on the aircraft is inoperative and does not affect the mission capability.

<sup>13</sup>Each aircraft has an ADB which lists all corrected discrepancies for the last ten flights as well as all uncorrected discrepancies.



the attitude, aggressiveness, and leadership of the maintenance department. One senior officer stated that if you are sincere about being ready to fight a war, then you've got to continue to maintain all the aircraft systems, not just those that allow you to use flight hours.

Each squadron visited placed a high priority on flying "fully up" jets. These squadrons carried minimum "up" gripes. "We get them off [the books], fix them.(SAILOR) They took a great deal of pride in working gripes off as soon as possible. In these squadrons the attitude was one in which the maintenance personnel, when assigned to fix a specific gripe, would volunteer to fix associated gripes "while I'm there anyway." Not the attitude of, "If it is not assigned to me. . . . I'm not going to do it." "When you sign off gripes, you know it's fixed. Take the time to do it right." (SAILOR) Often there was competition between night check and day check maintenance crews concerning quality and number of gripes fixed.

#### V. VISION AND PLANNING; OR HOW DO WE GET FROM HERE TO THERE?

What exactly is vision? Perhaps the best way to describe it is the ability to plan ahead. Planning ahead for the month or the week or sometimes even the day, just to be one step ahead of a potential crisis. Once the plans are formulated they are communicated to everyone so that everyone knows what is expected to happen and when. Vision is the

ability to look at the action of today and see what ramifications they might create tomorrow. The skipper must be able to clearly see the big picture. He must know how all the pieces of the picture fit together. He plans ahead in order for all the pieces to fall into place at some time in the future. Some skippers plan six to eight months ahead of time. They stress putting more effort into the early stages of planning for an evolution. They call this "front loading" and feel that it gets the momentum going early. One skipper said that he felt his squadron differed from non excellent squadrons in this area. He said that his squadron took great care to plan their maintenance and administrative efforts more than any of the other commands he had been in. Other skippers identify objectives and problems early enough so when the problems arise, they have time to iron them out. This way they do not find themselves playing "catch up ball" as frequently as maybe another squadron, that does not plan ahead, would. "We still play our share of catch up ball, but we try to front load as much as we can so we can identify some of the problems early and so that when finally the evolution is pulled off we're pretty much in high gear by the time it happens." (SKIPPER)

In addition to doing the long range planning it is of critical importance that the plans be transmitted to all command personnel. Everyone must know what is going on in order for things to flow smoothly. "[communicating the

plans of the squadron] so that the troops are able to plan their time also, not only the officers. The squadron is very people oriented. Most of us basically came out of the maintenance department . . . and if you make the people happy, everything else kind of falls into place." (SAILOR)

Long range planning is very important to the skippers. "[Prior to a skipper reporting aboard ] the squadron reacted to everything. They didn't do any long range planning or were not the masters of their destiny. They sat back and waited till the crisis hit, then responded. . . . Long range planning became a major factor in the way I conducted daily business as the XO and later as the CO." (SKIPPER)

With a good planning system in place, crisis management is nearly eliminated. "This command doesn't crisis manage. Every other command I've been in has crisis managed. . . . The paperwork for this month was done last month. Right now we keep trying to push back a TransPac that's coming up late in July. They have written the LOI [Letter of Instruction]. They know who's going on it. They know what we're doing. They are writing letters for berthing. They are that far ahead. We don't crisis manage. . . ." (XO)<sup>14</sup> Crisis managers do not seem to have time. . . . Not even to learn from their mistakes. It is important to do long range

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<sup>14</sup>Comment was made by the XO of an excellent squadron. All quotes made by the XO from these squadrons will be identified in parentheses and will not be footnoted.

planning in all areas of concern to a squadron. Every area will have some impact on personnel in the squadron. "Leave management is a huge problem. . . . You can really upset morale. You may upset an individual but when he goes down to the ready room and tells everyone that the CO disapproved his leave, pretty soon the perception is that we are all going to hell in a hand basket. You need to have a game plan going in and the troops need to know how it is managed. We came off of cruise last year and six months before we came off cruise I told them [the troops] how we were going to manage leave for the next two years. That's how long range that planning was. . . . Leave management is something our airman knew from day one two years ago exactly how we would operate leave. They know it so I don't have to disapprove very many leave chits. It was a source of contention that was eliminated." (SKIPPER) Long range planning in all areas does have an impact on the operation of the squadron.

"Tell them a year in advance how you are going to run the whole year and stay with it. It's the easiest problem in the world to manage. I submit that not every command does that." (SKIPPER)



## W. "WARDROOM" IN THE READY ROOM

The action in a squadron is found in one of two places; maintenance or the ready room. We have already discussed maintenance, let us now take a look at the other hub of activity, the ready room. Aboard ship "A lot of time is spent in the ready room of a squadron." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) This is where people share their ideas, help each other develop both professionally and personally. It is here that the squadron displays its plaques, trophies, pictures, awards and any other sign of pride. It is also here that all information about missions and assignments is disseminated. "You can go into the ready room, and the good squadron is the one where the junior officers hang out in the ready room and they've always got a smile on their face." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF) This is the briefing room, where everybody goes to find out what the plan of action is. After the quarterdeck, this is the second place that officers can visit and decide for themselves how excellent the squadron is. They look for things like cleanliness and atmosphere. How are the people in the ready room conducting themselves? Are they professional or what? The ready room is utilized as a living room and an office. It is here that people are generally found unless they are working on missions. If maintenance is referred to as the heart of the squadron, then the ready room must be the lungs. It, too, is an important area.

X. XO/CO

The two most important players in the squadron are the skipper and the exec. It is imperative that they be able to work well together.

There's always been a good relationship between the CO and the XO. That's important. You can't have the CO and the XO working at cross purposes. My own opinion of the XO's job is that I support whatever the skipper says. If the skipper walks in and says, "We're all going to speak Swedish today.", then it's my job to go and convince everybody that we're all going to speak Swedish. I may go into his office and say "Are you sure you want to do this?" But if he says "By God that's what we're going to do.", that's what we're going to do. But then, I don't operate in a vacuum either. I will go to the department heads and say, "You guys are my main implementers here. We're all going to speak Swedish today. We're going to go down and convince everybody that they want to speak Swedish, too." I think the relationship between the CO and the XO is important. (XO)

It is not so important that one be of one management style and the other of another management style, just so long as they complement each other. The skippers interviewed said their execs must not be "yes" men. They must be loyal to the skipper and respect him and his decisions, but they must also tell the skipper when they think he is wrong.

Generally he [CO] bounces everything off me before he says it. He'll say this is the way I want to do it and I'll pull out the [his] rules and I'll say these are your rules. Either you live by your rules or you change your rules. I won't change them, I don't think you should change them either. We talk about the perceptions if we change the rules. You have to be hard and fast on discipline. Everybody wears the same pants, and puts them on the same way and they live by those rules. He breaks his rules I'm the first one to go after him. "Skipper you're not doing it right." Master

Chief is the same way. He is going to live with his rules. We've seen a lot of CO's lay out rules and they don't live by them and expect everyone else to. He doesn't want to do that, he's human. He tries to do it and he's got two of us on his back. (XO)

#### Y. "YES"--POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Squadrons as an entity seem to have a personality. If you have strong leadership in a squadron it perpetuates itself. We have strong leadership and positive attitudes. Hopefully, this will perpetuate itself for a long time. I've seen other squadrons which did not have strong leadership, didn't have a real positive "Go get them" attitude. It was "We're just going to do this and it's going to get done." Or, they have the grippers . . . and that seemed to perpetuate itself over a long period of time, like an infection from old squadron member to newcomer. I don't see anything but positive things passed here. (OFFICER)

"Yes" denotes positiveness. And that is what you find in the excellent squadrons I visited. The people are so positive. Nobody grumbles that "It cannot be done." I don't mean to say that nobody grumbles, but there is a good feeling to be had walking around in these squadrons having people you do not even know speak to you, smile at you; just being happy, and positive about themselves, and their jobs. It is such an infectious feeling. "The attitude, I think, permeates the atmosphere the minute you walk aboard the spaces." (SENIOR, FLAG, WING) No matter how tired I was when I walked into the excellent squadrons, by the time I got out of there, I may have been physically fatigued, but mentally I was quite refreshed. The peer pressure is subtle. Nobody tells you that you must like your job, but when everybody

around you is happy, your problems seem to disappear. "This is the best command. . . . From the day I stepped into it, you get caught up in that winning attitude. You just start performing. They demand performance and they make you a performer, then they support you as a performer. There are more letters of appreciation, commendations, awards farmed out to everyone. . . . It gets all the way down to the people." (SAILOR) Positive attitudes are rampant in the excellent squadrons I visited. I noticed it immediately as I walked into the ready room, and in admin, and in maintenance. People everywhere were either busy at their desks, or engaged in conversations. There was a lot of laughter and teasing. I noticed it everywhere. The skippers pointed out that this is one of the side benefits of everything else they do. They really do not know how a positive attitude develops, but once there, it seems to regenerate itself. "We are the Best" is in the smile that people are always wearing. There is a "Can Do" spirit. "It is easiest for organizations to excel when they have a positive involvement." (SENIOR, CAPT, WING STAFF)

The squadron personnel, for the most part, are very flexible. They are trusting and they know that if something changes it is for a good reason and the skipper will share that reason with them. They know that the seniors in the command respect them and they, in turn, respect the judgement of those seniors to them. They know and trust



that to be true. In turn, they will not look for reasons why they cannot do things, they will know immediately that there is a way to do the job. A good example of this "positiveness" is the "up" gripes. Sailors will fix small things that do not impair the mission readiness of the aircraft just because they are working on the aircraft in the location of the problem. While they have everything apart, or are in the area they might as well fix it. That way, they won't have to come back to that spot on the plane. "Do it right the first time." It does not matter that they have not been told to fix it yet. This type of work attitude is more the rule than the exception. "It's kind of amazing when you start doing well and see things happen. In my other squadron, there is no way that people worked as hard as they do in this squadron. You see people, nobody dictates around here that you have to come in at seven o'clock and the workday starts for the troopers at seven o'clock but nobody dictates." (SAILOR)

The essence of this is that people have positive frames of mind and reference. They look for the good in all situations and make the best of the unpleasant situations. Rather than saying "No it cannot be done." They look at difficult assignments knowing they can be done and the challenge is to discover how. There is a healthy respect in the squadron by all members, towards all members. Everyone knows that the other guy wants only to help and not to

"screw" them. Trust exists and people know that they are being dealt with fairly. Knowing this, they are confident and happy.

## Z. ZEST--FUN

I did not mean to save the fun for last, it just happened that way. It was a general consensus with practically everyone that it was important to have fun. One maintenance chief went out of his way to tease his people. He told me about the good group of people he had working for him and how he enjoyed the bantering. Everybody else seemed to feel the same. They knew that he was teasing them, and that he truly liked them and respected their capabilities and talents.

The squadron parties and get-togethers were another way of having fun. The excellent squadrons thought their squadrons got together more often than other squadrons. They talked about working hard and playing hard.

One skipper said "if it's not fun you're not doing it right." . . . [This expression is so often quoted that it has become something of a cliché.] Leadership involves letting the people have fun." (SENIOR, CAPT, CNO STAFF) This same sentiment was also expressed by some senior officers and some squadron personnel.

The skippers talked about the importance of insuring that the people get time off after they have been asked to work above and beyond. They also mentioned some little

rewards for the people. One skipper cited this example: One division officer had worked his people quite long hours one particular week. At the end of the week, when everybody secured, the division officer had purchased a keg of beer and everyone partook. These are the little rewards that keep the people working and keep the work fun.

One skipper talked about gamesmanship. He related a story about one of the lieutenants in his squadron who was interested in sports. He got a copy of the base instruction on intramural sports and calculated formulas which would earn the squadron participation points. Prior to going out to sea, this LT scheduled many events i.e., swimming, archery, badminton, and all the off-the-wall sports. He then cajoled the squadron personnel into participating. They did. Soon there was a lot of interest in the games. Approximately 65% of the squadron got involved in this intramural effort. Although the squadron was away at sea for more than half the year, they set the record for most points and received Airlant's sportsmanship trophy.

For the most part, the people I met had a knack for mischief. They were playful and eager to joke. When asked why he thought his squadron had been picked as the excellent squadron, one young straightfaced sailor said, "We get the Commodore drunk." There is a real healthy sense of humor found in each of the excellent squadrons I visited.

### III. CONCLUSION

In analyzing the contents of my "A to Z" findings, four natural associations or groupings seem to emerge: People, Reason for Being, Teamwork, and Balance. Each of these four attributes are related and interact and impact on each other. In this conclusion I will define for you what I mean.

Within the "alphabet soup" described in the last chapter a single recurring theme is evident in every section. That theme is the people factor. People caring for other people. People leading other people. People communicating with other people. Everything accomplished through people. It is my conclusion that the most important attribute to excellence in Tactical Air is recognizing the "people" factor. People are creatures who have needs and abilities. If their needs are not met, they will not function to their maximum potential. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is clearly a significant factor. fact. Those who fail to understand its critical importance may dismiss this human relations concept as "touchy feely", however, it cannot be discounted. Every one of the senior officers I interviewed talked at length about the importance of caring for your people. They defined it in many different terms, but always returned to, people. One senior officer talked about the merits of



returning to "good old fashioned leadership". He backed up his comment about leadership by discussing the importance of the people factor. Although it may sound easy to say "People" is the key, this key encompasses a large area. I think that if you start with the cliché "Treat others as you would want to be treated" you can begin to understand what all it entails. You do not want to be treated like a mushroom "kept in the dark . . ." so you must begin to communicate better. Good communications takes time and energy, yet it reaps great rewards. You want to be treated with respect, the respect that you, as a worthwhile creature of God, deserve. So why would everyone else not want the same? When given something to do, do you want someone looking over your shoulder telling you how to do it, or do you want to be left alone and allowed to give it your best shot? I want to prove myself to others, I want to do it alone. But I want to feel free to ask for help. Allowing others to stretch themselves, yet letting them know that you will help if they so desire, giving of yourself; these are just a few of the human aspects, but the concerns are many. Just imagine everything that you want and need, then realize that someone else in the world has their own similar wants and needs. The person who lives and believes these things will probably be considered a great leader. I see a positive self-esteem as well as a positive attitude towards all people. Incredible things can be achieved by positive

thinking and stroking. One officer called it massaging your people. Stroking them, making them feel that they are important. Providing the opportunity/environment for development of high self esteem. It is merely creating a self fulfilling prophecy, but oh how far you can go, with that magic behind you. The Pygmalian Effect is real. Making a person know that s/he will succeed. No person on earth is either perfect or useless. Everyone has a reason for being, a strength, something to share with others. Those excellent squadron skippers seem to have recognized this fact and try to identify just what strengths certain people have. Key people in key jobs, those they are best suited for. This was important to several people I interviewed. Have they found the secret? One skipper talked about the importance of peoples' backgrounds. He was looking to diversify his squadron's experience base. He was also the one who said that he never makes a major decision without first making the most of his 180 years of experience. He was referring to his 20 years, added to his XO's 18 years, added to . . . , and on down the line. He was making use of the experiences of others, and truly reaping benefits from the lessons learned by members of his team, his squadron. The skippers of the excellent squadrons seem to have found this secret. They were described as having charisma, yet they all talked about the importance of their people. None of them took any credit in the

attainment of excellence by their squadrons. It was always the people in their squadrons that had excelled.

Once armed with the power of the "people", you can perform miracles if you channel that energy in the right direction. Another important attribute I found in the excellent squadrons is having a "Reason for Being". In this I include the "why" or, the goal of the squadron, the end result. The "what" is the mission. What is it that needs to be done to accomplish the goal? And lastly the "how" or the planning and processes needed to accomplish the mission. This "Reason for Being" must be known by all, but must be defined from the top. The skipper of the squadron must clearly be able to see the "Big Picture". And he must communicate this to all and use it to focus the energy of his people. That is not to say that he knows all the jobs and everyone knows his job, I only mean, that each and every member of the squadron must know how his individual piece of the puzzle fits. If unknown, then he will be "in the dark", unable to focus on what is important to the mission and, unsatisfied.

The third attribute I believe to be "teamwork." Being in the excellent squadrons was almost like being at home. In fact, several of the young sailors referred to the squadron as their home. They identified the team as a family. They were exceptionally comfortable with each other and there was lots of trust and respect. "Teamwork" closely

ties in with both the "People" concept and "Reason for Being." It is obvious that without committed and focused people you cannot have a team. The Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultures hold the family unit in very high esteem. They carry this esteem into the workplace with them. In the other studies done on excellence in the military,<sup>15</sup> teamwork plays an integral part in the functioning of military organizations, be they squadrons, ships, Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Marines. Unlike the books on excellence in American corporations currently on the market, the United States Military is more conducive to creating teamwork and in that way more like the Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultures.

The last attribute to emerge is "Balance", that is the ability to do everything well. I see these four attributes so intertwined that it is difficult to pull them apart to talk about. "Balance" is the sum of "the what." What does the squadron do? The squadron does everything well. It is able to juggle many projects simultaneously without letting any of them slide or falter. Every squadron has a large number of assets and in the well balanced squadrons, each one of those assets, be it the people, the equipment, the staff, or whatever, is completely identified. Every asset

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<sup>15</sup>Several other theses have been completed on the subject of excellence in some branch of the military. All are identified in the bibliography.



is considered and utilized to its maximum potential. The squadron can achieve the near impossible because it is armed with a large number of resources. It is realistic and sets priorities. It has a firm grasp of what needs to be done, how it will be done, and by when. It then follows up to insure that the work is complete. Indeed, those excellent squadrons are doing that. The basic things that everyone takes for granted, like cleanliness of the spaces, these squadrons have developed good habits and maintain high standards by always doing it right the first time. "If you don't do it right the first time, when are you going to have the time to do it again?"

Wrapped around these attributes I find a "time" element. That is to say that none of these things mentioned can be of a "flash in the pan" type duration. They all take large amounts of time to practice and perfect and they must be continually maintained. Those squadrons that I interviewed knew this. They were not overnight successes. They had worked long and hard practicing perfection. They freely admitted that they were human and would never be perfect, but that was no reason not to aim for perfection.

Although I visited with two F-14 and two A-6 excellent squadrons, I discerned no real differences in standard operating procedures between the two communities. In other words, an excellent F-14 squadron looks just the same as an excellent A-6 squadron.

## A. POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE STUDY

Although I chose to look at only the excellent squadrons McBer and Company conducted a study on Command Effectiveness which looked at both superior and average performing air squadrons [Ref. 1]. Their results for superior air squadrons closely parallel mine. Nonetheless, further studies along these lines should be considered.

Additionally, research examining the relative weight or importance of each attribute should be undertaken. Key questions are: Can a squadron considered excellent possess only a few key attributes and still remain excellent? Can a squadron possess all but a few attributes and remain average? Are some attributes more important than others? Clearly I think that the four attributes highlighted in my conclusion are of primary importance. Further study in this area could reveal some interesting correlations between the different attributes.

APPENDIX A  
THE F-14 TOMCAT

The F-14 Tomcat is a carrier based and land based, variable sweep wing, all weather fighter-interceptor.

Administratively, the west coast functional wing reports to Commander, Naval Air Pacific (COMNAVAIRPAC). The west coast functional wing commander is Commander, Fighter Airborne Early Warning Wing U.S. Pacific Fleet located at Naval Air Station Miramar, California. Administratively, the east coast functional wing reports to Commander, Naval Air Atlantic (COMNAVAIRLANT.) The functional wing commander is Commander, Tactical Wings Atlantic, located at Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia. The east coast F-14 squadrons are an operational wing of Tactical Wings Atlantic located at Naval Air Station Oceana (Fighter Wing One.)

A typical fighter wing consists of ten to twelve squadrons. Each squadron contains approximately 250 enlisted personnel and 35 officers. Each squadron has 12 F-14 aircraft operated by 12 to 14 flight crews. The crew consists of the Pilot and the Radar Intercept Officer (RIO.) The F-14 carries a variety of air-to-air weapons including missiles and guns. They intercept and engage enemy aircraft, and escort attack and reconnaissance aircraft.

## APPENDIX B

### THE A-6 INTRUDER

The A-6 intruder is a carrier based and land based, fixed wing, all-weather, day and night bomber.

Administratively, the west coast functional wing reports to Commander, Naval Air Pacific (COMNAVAIRPAC.) The functional wing commander is Commander, Medium Attack Tactical Electronic Warfare Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet located at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington.

Administratively, the east coast functional wing reports to Commander, Naval Air Atlantic (COMNAVAIRLANT.) The functional wing commander is Commander, Tactical Wings Atlantic located at Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia. The east coast A-6 squadrons are an operational wing of Tactical Wings Atlantic located at Naval Air Station Oceana (Medium Attack Wing One.)

A typical medium attack wing consists of five to seven A-6 squadrons. Each squadron contains approximately 220 enlisted personnel and 40 officers. Each squadron has ten to fifteen A-6 aircraft flown by 15 to 17 flight crews. The crew consists of a Pilot and a Bombardier/Navigator (BN.) The A-6 Intruder's main job is to destroy enemy targets, at sea and ashore, with rockets, guided missiles, torpedoes, mines, and conventional or nuclear bombs.



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17. Commander Tactical Wings Atlantic 1  
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18. Commander Fighter Airborne Early Warning Wing 1  
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